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The trickster of exiled intellectuals: Arcane opposition to the perceived injustice

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Abstract

Globally, governments are persecuting intellectuals in their home countries. Employing data from ethnographic fieldwork, the present paper has a focus on exiled scholars, artists, and writers hosted in the Nordic countries. Living in exile enables the interlocutors to criticise the regimes' perceived injustice, and to accuse them of limiting freedom of expression and human rights. In return, the exiled intellectuals are regarded as a threat, and they are personally persecuted in the form of torture, "ideological re-education", imprisonment, execution or "disappearance". Embedded in their opposition is a belief that cultural forms can change, and the equivocal nature of the trickster figure symbolises the interlocutors' defiance of the perceived homogeneity. Applying trickster analytically provides an opportunity for illuminating normative common-senseness, which can reveal potentials for the cultural transformation of static cultures and identities. The interlocutors' opposition takes shape by using a diversity of creativity and innovative constellations, which shows that power structures can be contested and that social conditions can be shaped by agency.

KEYWORDS: intellectuals, dissent, trickster, migration, civil society

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Introduction

> '*Loke has often brought the asas [gods] into great trouble, and often helped them out again, with his cunning contrivances.*' (The younger eda, trans. by R. B. Anderson, 2006)

Odin's account of the Norse trickster-god Loke could correspondingly refer to exiled intellectuals, who live in uncertainty fleeing from their countries' regimes of homogenous identities pertaining to politics, nationalism, ethnicism, and religionism. Because of their opposition, they are subjected to severe retribution and threatened by losing their livelihood, persecution of friends and family, imprisonment, "ideological re-education", the death penalty or "disappearance" (unofficial execution).

By examining the experiences of exiled intellectuals in the Nordic countries, I am not only interested in the relation between the regimes' social structure and the interlocutors' agency vis-à-vis social change; I also wish to explore the arcane roles played by the intellectuals in their opposition to perceived injustice. Like Loke, the interlocutors possess qualities of social critique to cultural normativity, and I argue that they hold traits of the trickster, which is a character who is non-compliant towards authoritarianism, and capable of producing new forms of culture that promote freedom of expression and human forms of co-existence. The trickster's qualities of challenging structure for the benefit of creative transformation provide meaningfulness in a chaotic world, which, according to the interlocutors, is needed for cultural change and transcendence of stagnant limits and boundaries.

One way of addressing a supposed dilemma of anthropology lacking critique (e.g., Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Eriksen, 2006) is to interpret social arenas as fields of hegemonic struggle. Their opposition to dominant authority (Scott, 1985; Turner, 2008) discerns the intellectuals as actors of counter-culture and as an inextricable part of power mechanisms. They represent trickster's traits by demonstrating the flaws of cultural contexts, and they perceive themselves as expressing the longing of the people subdued by the regimes.

The trickster is at the periphery of recognised structures, which is culturally prolific because of the ability to view social conditions from the outside and to laugh at and potentially change cultural conditions. Ideally, the regimes will collapse or change to avoid being isolated from the rest of the world, but as the current, global struggles show, social change is not easily achieved. They transcend cultural settings, but in the regimes' essentialist cultural values, one can have only specific identities, and subscribing to others

is perceived as a threat. Like the trickster, the informants are, therefore, equivocal and outside of the conventional order, and thus in a vulnerable, unprotected and dangerous position.

This paper begins by introducing the fieldwork's methodological approach, which is followed by an account of the social context of the interlocutors, presented as three vignettes. In order to illuminate the analytical basis, I then offer some theoretical reflections on the symbolic qualities of trickster and concepts relating to the regimes' perceived homogeneity. In the latter section, I argue that the exiled intellectuals are autonomous cultural symbols of trickster insisting on human values and that their opposition arises from discontent and from a sense of necessity for a human sensibility. They demonstrate that power mechanisms can be addressed and opposed, and in their struggle, the interlocutors are potential transformers of culture if they are given adequate space and time.

Because the interlocutors are in a vulnerable and potentially dangerous situation, they are given pseudonyms; and their home countries, host institutions, host cities and places of work are anonymised.

Methodological reflections

The process of finding interlocutors has been lengthy and demanding. To assure the safety of prospective informants, I first wrote each host institution or city, who contacted each potential informant, and then each individual would contact me if they were interested in participating.

For one year and a half, I have done ethnographic fieldwork consisting of participant observation, semi-structured and focus group interviews among individuals hosted in the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. Striving for a sense of security, all 20 formal interviews have taken place in the informants' workplace or in a public place chosen by them: cafes, libraries, cultural event venues, or on Skype. The interviews have taken place equally in each of the four countries, and two thirds of the observation have been in Sweden and Denmark.

I employ an anthropological analytical tradition of viewing empirical themes as representative of tendencies in broader societal issues (Eriksen 2006; Mills 2000). Charles Wright Mills (2000) reminds us that there is always interaction between the individual and social structures and that social ties bind us together and form complex networks that determine individual action. Social arenas are therefore never fixed entities, because

cultural norms are persistently being contested (Barth, 1982). Similarly, the informants represent a broad range of experiences and activities (Hannerz, 2010) and are constantly in flux, but a number of trends are nevertheless prominent, which provides a framework for understanding local knowledges and navigations in social settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Svensson, 2014). In the first phase of fieldwork, the approach has been exploratory to learn of the informants' challenges and potentials (Stebbins, 2001). Gradually, the themes became focused on recurring subjects and, based on the informants' narratives and reflections, the paper deliberates on reasons for fleeing the home country; the challenges of coming to the host country, institution or city; why they continue their work despite the obvious danger to themselves, friends, colleagues, and family.

Empirical context and three vignettes

The exiled intellectuals come from Russia, Turkey, a range of countries in the Middle East, different parts of Africa, South Asia, and South America. Half of the interlocutors are scholars working in a university, and the other half are artists, writers and journalists hosted in host cities. For at least half of them, however, their activities transcend such classifications including academic writing and talks, satire, drawings, poetry, fiction writing, cartoons, theatre and music.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) and *International Cities of Refuge Network* (ICORN), which are two of the largest global actors in this field, have facilitated contact between the interlocutors and the host institutions and cities. Half of the interlocutors have a residency permit as long as they are part of the programmes, and the other half can receive permanent citizenship whenever they wish.

In each of their host countries, the intellectuals have a sense of freedom of movement, but most say that it is difficult to get in touch with the local population. On the other hand, almost all frequently meet at social gatherings and cultural events or study groups to discuss political matters. The participant observation was primarily done in these contexts, including academic and cultural talks and readings, concerts, literature- and cultural festivals.

In the interlocutors' struggle—like intellectuals so often before—they have a form of freedom of expression and action to potentially initiate change on behalf of the population (Ross, 2014) from a profound dissatisfaction with the inanity of authoritarianism. Although they are in many ways hierarchically inferior, such anti-structural features can upset established structures for the benefit of cultural change (Turner, 2008; Armbrust,

2019). Even though they come from a variety of backgrounds, I view them as "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1999) in the sense of being characterised more by their actions and aspirations than by education, class or heritage. Kasimir, who is an artist and cartoonist, reflects on intellectuals' distinctive position. He feels that globally it is a group of likeminded individuals, who in many ways are better off than others are, but who are often forced to flee their country of origin because of oppositional values. They are individuals who are in a unique situation because of their capitals and talents (Chomsky, 1967), which parallels trickster qualities of being able to generate dissent.

To exemplify the social and political conditions for the informants, I present three vignettes (Langer 2016) consisting of impressions, experiences and reflections from fieldwork.

Maier

Two weeks in advance, I made plans for meeting with Maier. I skype her at her office after getting her contact information through her Norwegian university, and our conversation begins on a high note as she shares her story. She was a researcher and teacher at a university in her home country, but the overall societal situation and opportunity for conducting research deteriorated rapidly. 'What I do for my country is to continue my research from a safer place', she says, and continues, 'so I needed help to apply for a residency'. Four months later Scholars at Risk informed her that she had been accepted for a position as an associate professor, which also means that she is entitled to status as a permanent resident in Norway.

When we speak of the circumstances in her country and possibilities for returning, the mood changes markedly. She recounts how she moved her children from one room to another all night because of the bombing in the city centre. For a long time, Maier is silent, and she is struggling to hold back tears. Ravaged by war, her country is in political conflict, and she experiences that the government believe that they have the right to kill or kidnap researchers, who are labelled as dissidents or traitors.

Maier becomes hesitant when she tells of her family and thoughts of returning. 'If you return, what are you going to do?' she asks hypothetically, 'They will ask you where you have been.' Maier's distrust in the government is obvious, but wariness related to her family's safety is, of course, more prevalent.

Thirty minutes into the conversation, Maier begins crying profusely when thinking of all this; in an unspoken mutual agreement, we end the interview after I attempt some reassuring words.

Kasimir

I meet Kasimir in a lounge adjacent to the venue of a cultural event in Denmark. He introduces himself as an artist, political cartoonist, cultural producer and 'sometimes a writer'. 'I do whatever I can', he says, and explains that he is hosted for two years in the Danish city facilitated through ICORN; he thus has a two-year residency permit.

His passport is from [country in Africa], he is born in Hungary, his father was a diplomat, and he grew up in Kuwait and went to school in Doha. For the previous decade he has been traveling the world to talk about 'our side of the world' [the global South] and freedom and democracy. As such, he considers himself representing his country even though he currently does not live there.

It has been tough in terms of racism and politics, he asserts, because he feels that Europeans and Americans mostly control the global narratives. The government and autonomous groups do whatever they want in his country, he says, and explains his view that 'the West' often supports dictatorships and authoritarian regimes.

Kasimir's anger grows during our two-hour conversation. It peaks when he mentions that people are randomly killed and that Muslim women are especially oppressed. About an hour into our interview, he takes me up on my initial offer of a drink and a sandwich, after which he conveys that both for himself and for his artist colleagues, it is difficult to attain a visa to anywhere if one is not associated with an official institution, as the exiled scholars at the universities are. He says that his mother wanted to visit him, but her visa was refused by 'the Danes'. She then got a visa approved by Spain for ten days, and Kasimir was able to go there. 'But that is only enough for a short holiday', he reflects. He stresses that he and the other hosted artists need more official support in their career and in order to plan the future; not only a place to stay. He ends our talk by asking me rhetorically, 'I am here in Denmark for only two years, so what am I going to do after September?'

After a full day at the event, we leave the venue at the same time, and despite having felt a bit intimidated by his temper, I feel that we part as friends.

Asur

We meet in Asur's office at the Swedish university, where she is an associate professor. After pouring us each a cup of coffee, Asur begins speaking about the dilemmas in her career. She received her doctoral degree in London, and then went back to Turkey working as a scholar in film studies. Through Scholars at Risk, she received her current appointment, researching history and germ theory. She additionally does some voluntary work for a local cultural festival.

Asur mentions a petition, which she signed together with more than 1000 scholars from her country. After this, the president called them traitors in a speech, and a purge lasting for a year began, in which fifty per cent of the scholars were fired. Each of the scholars was being tried individually, but suddenly the government proposed a deal because of the international reactions: one could accept the charges and revoke the right to appeal, after which the trial would then be suspended for five years. Finally, however, the courts ruled that the charges were a human rights issue and against the constitution.

During this process, Asur considered finding a safe place, because she and her colleagues were beginning to self-censor; and in some universities, students were recording lectures and sending complaints, if they criticised the government.

Her account took a toll on Asur, I could see, but after a short break and a sip of coffee, she lightened up when explaining the process of coming to Sweden. She applied to Scholars at Risk, which was a lengthy process o eight months with continuous communication. She moved with her partner and has been working at the university for a year, after which her contract will be extended:

> Now the question is what is next. I have the option to return, which is a good thing as there are no legal threats. But the thing is that the country is very unstable, and academia is still not free. I could apply for jobs in Europe. Alternatively, I will go back home and see what happens.

Considerations of analytical concepts

Applying features of the trickster makes it possible to analyse the informants as everyday social phenomena embedded in and beyond institutionalised practices. The informants embody the trickster's features and ambiguity because of their outsider position. As an analytical tool, the trickster can help us to understand such states of being as more than final entities. The complexity in any social arena is emphasised through trickster 'ranging from lewd prankster to divine creator; goblin to god; human to jackal; incarna-

tion within the lowest of animals, the louse, to Spirit Keeper of the highest, the eland' (Guenther 1999).

In often comical and surprising ways, the trickster exposes rigid cultural conditions and irreconcilable contradictions, which contributes to a critique of normative representations of culture. The trickster encapsulates meta-states of transformation, death and rebirth (Radin, 1956) and, to add to the elusiveness, the trickster is not necessarily a living being but may be expressions of human relations or traditions in social settings. Sometimes the trickster is a deity, sometimes merely associated with gods, and sometimes in the shape of mortal human or an animal with a symbolic character.

Prometheus, the trickster-god of ancient Greece, steals the fire from Zeus and suffers terrible punishment, but in the process, culture in the form of fire is given to humans. The trickster can be viewed as an archetypal image embodying arcane ambiguity and diversity. The trickster figure takes on forms as diverse as Prometheus, Loke, Krishna, Hermes or Anansi across spatial and temporal dimensions including ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, Norse cultures, shamanic communities and, as we see among the informants, in modern society as well. It is, however, essential to be cautious of universalist definitions, because social phenomena are to be analysed as having their own contexts. Nevertheless, I view the trickster and associated qualities as manifest in any given culture (Herskovits et al., 1958; Keeney, 2004). Such a notion has been challenged as being an abstraction (Hyde, 2008). In contrast, Evans-Pritchard's (1976) analysis of the Azande in Sudan illuminates that magical and mythical images represent advanced cultural codes, and I argue that analysis applying the symbolic figure of the trickster can be fruitful.

We all belong to the same species, but we are not the same as other people, and I emphasise the trickster as expressions of existence spanning multiple dimensions as a condition in social arenas. Just as the trickster embodies qualities of non-doctrine and elusiveness, the informants represent a diversity of phenomena, which makes them difficult to conceptualise. The trickster represents non-linear and non-causal forms, which will present a predicament for scholars absorbed in rigid categorisation (Guenther, 1999). As the trickster embodies interstitial creativity and opposition, analytically applying the trickster reflects an ambition to deal with ambiguity and diversity (Hannerz, 2010), which necessitates notions of eclecticism, plurality and non-categorisation (Barth, 1982; Hannerz, 2010; Hylland, 2010; Hastrup, 2018). Diversity is the rudimentary condition of human action and interaction (Arendt, 2004).

Murat, who is employed as a social scientist at a Finnish university, tells me of an experience that highlights the interlocutors' ambiguous and often unwilling social position,

as opposed to *regular* refugees and the local, permanently employed colleagues. He had just arrived in Finland and was sitting with a colleague in the waiting room of a government building waiting to have some documents processed. An angry-looking fellow started ranting racist comments along the lines that all non-majority ethnic people need to leave the country. Things changed radically, however, when Murat's colleague told the man that Murat is an invited scholar hosted at the city's university. After a short while, the man then reappeared and apologised effusively.

Despite the obvious uncomfortable aspects of the incident, Murat mostly finds it interesting, because he sees some evident social and class themes going on. His story demonstrates that the exiled intellectuals can evoke both hateful and heroic associations; but the trickster is not always either a hero or a god-like figure. The trickster can be normatively right and change unsound cultural expressions, or can be normatively wrong and reinforce unsound standards. Robert Brightman's (1999) analysis of clown performances among the Maidu in North America shows how trickster-figures are just as likely to be inherently conservative as revolutionary. Victor Turner (2008) describes that anomaly in cultures is often considered elevated, but that the pitfall of such a romanticised view is that the trickster only wins half of the time, and the other half ends in disaster. In other words, people can both laugh *with* and *at* the trickster.

Each of the informants expresses some sort of opposition to the perceived homogenous governments, *regimes*, in their countries, which indicates something more than merely a government. Djilas (1969) maintains that those who act as "lords of the world" can only perceive things absolutely, and Lenski (1966) terms a regime a group of people that have come to authority by force, and who possess political power. The regimes' strategies in the interlocutors' countries alter relentlessly. Judicial apparatuses being changed is one example, which makes it difficult for so-called dissidents to navigate. Prevalent are draconian laws about being against a specific interpretation of nationalism, religion or ethnicity. For example, insulting *Turkishness* can mean up to several years of imprisonment, which has been used to target the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, among other intellectuals. Analytically, this opens to two different principles in social arenas (Turner 2008): one is highly structured and hierarchical, which places people in positions of 'tightness and structure' (Guenther, 1999 p. 246); the other principle has emphasis on interaction, equality and cohesion. From their experiences and expression of opposition, I view the interlocutors as fitting principally in the latter category as trickster arbitrators of oppositional cultural codes.

Homogeneity—and awareness of human ideals and diversity

Kasimir works 'holistically for the people' at global and national cultural events, where he feels free to express himself. He thinks that all speech should be free and only draws the line at hate and genocide. It is difficult for him to explain the concept of freedom when he mentions it, but he says that it is about people being able to express themselves, especially about injustice: 'It is just to be you. It is about learning from others, and to accept one another. Freedom is to have the freedom to criticise.' One should be able to have a say without fear, he declares and accuses 'governmental hierarchies' of quenching the voice of the people.

Asur alludes to historical lessons to learn from the past when she reflects on why the host programmes are necessary. She encourages us to keep attention on the freedom of speech, as she currently sees a tendency for history to repeat itself on a global scale. Asur sees all of humankind as responsible for each other and asks what else we have to protect. She imagines her future as a global citizen working in "the academic field" from a base in Europe, to deal with political matters concerning her country to uphold the struggle for freedom.

Asur mentions why she continues her work despite it being so controversial and often perilous; she says that she and her colleagues have suffered too much and now want change. She connects it to speculations on why human beings exist and what our duties are:

> Who is going to make a change if not us? I am thinking of a better society for all people to live in. I am not created just to eat, drink, and have fun. Despite the dangers, it is the responsibility for all of us in the community. It is about everything, not only politics: culture, environment, freedom of expression, life, health. This is what I love and am supported and encouraged to do.

Asur now has the option to return, which on the one hand is positive, as there are no longer any legal threats. On the other hand, the country is still unstable, which affects the political environment, and therefore academia is still not free, she says. Consequently, whether Asur should stay or go and fight a more exposed struggle presents a dilemma: 'You develop certain skills. You have two swords, I think, depending on who you are talking to.'

In the struggle to make the world a better place, the trickster dares to risk life and limbs when acting in chaotic circumstances, in which powerlessness and lack of transparency otherwise prevail. The exiled intellectuals represent such features from an awareness of

human values and the possibility for cultural revitalisation. The trickster can experience defeat but thrives on being true to humanity. In North American indigenous cultures, the trickster makes fun of the chieftains' request to act according to the proper way of living (Radin, 1956). With a human face, the trickster can thus challenge and ridicule cultural institutions by erasing 'mundane law and propriety' (Hyde, 2008, p. 287), as Asur exemplifies. When I ask her why she does this, she takes a deep breath and leans back in her comfortable leather armchair, and after a short while she says, 'You feel the urge to do it; it makes you feel good. If you can't go back to being human, what will happen?'

Asur's research is not directly associated with politics, but she has voiced concern in articles and has signed petitions. As a sociologist, she feels a responsibility to think about overall society, which is part of being an *intellectual*, despite not being keen on the term. She sees it is as universal for scholars to have a basic right and academia as foundational for human responsibility, especially in terms of depolarising views and people. She does not see this space right now in her home country, which in her view shows that human ideals do not come easily, because in academia one can also justify inequality, which she sees happening in abundance among several of her colleagues, who are still in her country.

Altair, a journalist from northwest Asia, makes his exiled existence endurable by questioning the legitimacy of authoritarian institutions, and he mentions the restricted possibilities for stating one's nationality in passports as an example:

> Both my country and [host country] see citizens as one thing. I would like to be born on planet Earth. Maybe it is about time we start changing those nationality categories, because I consider people my home. Everywhere people are taking care of me or taking care of each other, loving each other and respecting each other wherever they are from, whatever their religion and backgrounds.

The diversity and creativity that Altair expresses are important for the interlocutors, not least as a symbol of the struggle as an avant-garde of human values, which can target stagnated systems, monopolistic views, and rigidity in social matters. According to the informants, being dynamic in both action and thought is a necessity in order to be efficient, and not least as a way of not being detained by the regimes' henchmen. Trickster underscores this diversity: 'Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the crossdresser, the speaker of sacred profanities' (Hyde 2008, p. 7).

Dynamic interpretations of identity are based on self-creation, diversity and openness to difference. As opposed to these convictions of the interlocutors are the regimes' essen-

tialist, either-or identities pertaining to ominous and static perceptions of nationality, ethnicity, and religion (Eriksen, 2006; Fenton & Mann, 2019) from an inclination that social arenas equal the socially structurable (Turner, 2008). The interlocutors are, therefore, uncontainable in the struggle to create a sustainable future. They are between categories, ambiguous and neither here nor there 'in and for a world of imperfections' (Hyde, 2008, p. 91). Djilas (1969) views this trait both as an essential human value, and as a necessary and continuous process as a reaction to dogmatism; otherwise, he argues, cultures will stagnate when coming under the control of monopolistic ideologies.

He maintains that though humans can bear their ordeals like Sisyphus, at some point one must like Prometheus be in opposition in order to change unsound cultural arenas before all strength is exhausted.

Cultural change and expressions of opposition

Social arenas are subject to borders and limits, which suggests a balancing act between stagnation and transformation. Healthy communities represent the views of the people, and if people do not experience meaningfulness, they look for alternatives, Alara feels. A continual negotiation consequently takes place when opposing structures form a sense of dissatisfaction. As apparent in trickster qualities, the prerequisite for the interlocutors' struggle is non-conformity as opposition.

Initially, Asur was in a unique situation, because her research was situated in a liberal, urban university, where the administrators never questioned her work, but soon she attracted attention from the government: 'the wrong kind of attention'. She is conscious of this relation to the regime, and together with the other exiled intellectuals, she represents a threat to the regimes' existence, which makes it difficult to navigate socially and professionally. When challenging the social order by viewing the current governments from new perspectives, and because the trickster wishes to be co-creator, the exiled intellectuals represent ambiguity and, therefore, there is a conflict of mutual opposition between them and the regimes.

The trickster can change culture if necessary, but according to one's perspective, the exiled intellectuals are unwelcome challengers of cultural manifestations, or they are much-longed-for purveyors of new cultural forms by facilitating and insisting on opposition. As such, they can be viewed as both destroyer and creator of cultural paradigms. Mary Douglas (2013) epitomises culture as a product of classification in social arenas, and if representatives of a culture feel attacked, the assailants will be punished in order

to restore order. The dominant group reacts by implementing symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1979); in this case, it is also expressed as direct physical violence. It is all about creating identities by playing on the fear of what is different and what falls outside of designated boundaries. If the trickster wins this battle, he or she is elevated as a cultural transformer, but if lost, then the trickster will fade away or remain in a permanent state of opposition (Radin, 1956).

In Asur's struggle, a sense of vigilance is prevalent, which makes her an opportunist when adapting to change. Sometimes the trickster's diversity and actions make sense, and at other times they lead to mistakes, but a key feature is that the trickster acts from his or her own convictions, which is a quality of the interlocutors is of paramount importance for potential cultural transformation to take place. Because creativity and innovation cannot flourish in rigid structures (Guenther, 1999), the interlocutors rely on the opportunities that arise in any given context (Graeber, 2020). Social media is one such prospect, which changes constantly, where they can have a voice and be heard in order to play a political and cultural role.

Kasimir is an avid user of social media and articulates his reasons: 'You know, I think we are just trying to tell our side of the story basically, because unfortunately, we are fighting.' He uses social media enthusiastically, and though he is sceptical of potential populism, it is nevertheless from here that he learns of what is going on in his country and in the global political climate:

> For the multiple cultures and different activities that artists and writers are bringing with them, social media is very necessary and important for the communities. Also for Europe facing the right wing and Nazis everywhere. I think it [social media] is what saved my life. It restored hope.

Asur shares this train of thought and mentions her country's "digital revolution" as a potential for cultural change in a constantly fluctuating political environment. She is, of course, aware of the academic traditions of attending courses, writing articles, and giving talks, but these days it is mostly through social media that exiled intellectuals are communicating, she feels. The downside is that one easily becomes prone to persecution, because the regimes can easily track you down – and the regimes are watching all the time, she assures me, which is why she no longer uses social media for explicitly political purposes.

If one is exposed to such power daily, as the exiled intellectuals express, oppression can become invisible with limited possibilities for opposition, because one will uncritically

be acting according to a set of social norms (Gramsci, 1999). However, if power takes the form of evident dominance and coercion, as the regimes are perceived, then reaction can happen openly (Djilas, 1969; Scott, 1985).

Trickster's opposition stems from experiences of domination, and the counter-narratives of the intellectuals challenge prevailing ideologies and perceived injustice (Gramsci, 1999). The potential for cultural change consists of inspiring people to negotiate their own social environments. 'Freedom can never become a commodity, and any attempt to obtain freedom from unambiguous doctrine will only result in the loss of it', says Altair and reasons that cultural change inherently denotes a room for social critique from an imagination that social arenas can change.

In the view of Zygmunt Bauman (1997), cultures that excessively catalogue and categorise social arenas will result in the destruction of human values. Graeber (2020) similarly argues that constructive human interaction between people can never occur in authoritarian forms, but only by opposing such cultures. The perceived morally dilapidated regimes will not necessarily fall by themselves; it may only happen because a struggle brings it down, Djilas (1969) maintains. Cultural dynamics and change within a social group often occur because of pressure from external elements (Turner, 2008), but open warfare as an ideologically unified revolution is not always necessary (Graeber, 2020); other forms of opposition can be effective. In communities torn apart by non-human homogeneity and classification, opposition can arise from interstitial spaces with the ability to change unstable cultural conditions (Tarrow, 2005, Della Porta, 2018; Thydal & Svensson, 2018). Countries repressed by regimes can change through ongoing critique, because the sterility of dogmatism and power monopoly displays the clash between regimes and citizens (Djilas, 1969), ultimately for the benefit of giving room for new movements and cultural ideas.

The downfall of tyranny does not happen just because it is brutal, Djilas (1969) argues; cultural change happens when it becomes clear that the despotism is no longer able to qualify its own existence. The role of the intellectuals' makes the regimes' structures seem all the more obvious, which ultimately can force the regimes to change their ways. By oppressing alternatives, the regimes delegitimise themselves, because no society can tolerate authoritarianism except under exceptional circumstances (Djilas, 1969). Regimes will then seize to represent the people even though they claim the right to define cultural agendas. A new order can then be established, providing a sense of security in the enactment of a novel habituated culture (Bourdieu, 1979). As Mary Douglas (2013) argues, we cannot think without the use of boxes, but we can become more fluid in order to em-

brace diversity, which is not a matter of sudden insight, but rather a result of gradually perceiving a situation in a new way, which one will then come to view as the new natural, cultural form.

Such opposition cannot be controlled, because the trickster is a timeless bringer of culture who makes the pieces of creation fall into place. The continual changing of seasons happens because trickster balances stability and change at the same time (Howe, 2019); in Benin and neighbouring Yoruba, the trickster-gods Legba and Eshu are arbitrators between heaven, earth and sea, which do not understand each other. Legba and Eshu understand all languages, so all communication goes through them (Herskovits et al., 1958). In this role of interpreter, the intellectuals are able to intervene and change cultural conditions.

As humans must keep alive the fire, which Prometheus has given them, the exiled intellectuals are persistently dynamic in order to oppose the perceived injustice and oppressive cultural forms of the regimes in their countries. Like Prometheus, by insisting on freedom and the legitimacy of opposition, they can bring people into possession of new cultural expressions, as opposed to the regimes' homogenic identities.

Conclusion

The exiled scholars, artists and writers, or *intellectuals*, are a potent group of individuals with autonomous qualities directed at a wish to build a world where human values are prevalent as opposed to the perceived oppressive and hegemonic regimes in their home countries. As the informants cannot unequivocally be placed in a category stipulated by the regimes, they are perceived as a threat, and criminalising their actions, and condemning their views as dissidence is ubiquitous. As a response, the regimes denounce them as unpatriotic or lacking solidarity with the nation-state, and they enact draconian legislations in order to attempt to disrupt the informants' opposition and ability to organise.

As the diversity among the interlocutors shows, social critique takes place in all walks of life in order for opposition to flourish. A range of views about the path to redemption and opposition are prevalent, and their actions and experiences of their present and future situation have given insights into motives and imaginings in social arenas.

The trickster is applied as an analytical approach to conceptualise their navigations and horizons. Through the concept of the trickster, I wish to understand the diversity of the interlocutors, who challenge, deconstruct and ideally create social arenas. Several fea-

tures of trickster are recognisable among the informants, including social critique and the creative transformer. Like the trickster, they often abstain from final and clear definitions of themselves as opposed to the homogenous structures that they criticise. Despite this elusiveness and muddiness, one feature is especially characteristic, as they recognise that their primary purpose is, from each of their specific fields, to work toward the ultimate goal of the emancipation of their countries. Dethronement does, however, not necessarily mean that the regimes' ideologies will vanish at the same time; they can only disappear if they are disrobed of their symbolic form. Consequently, cultural change is the manifestation of a conscious desire to alter social arenas, often by applying a high degree of diversity and creativity.

Despite local differences, the trickster's qualities are present in cultures globally. As an archetypal figure, the trickster symbolises human traits in order to understand and provide meaningfulness in a chaotic world concerned with challenging unsound practices. In this sense, the trickster is necessary for cultural transformation by unceasingly transcending limits and boundaries. When challenging structures, the interlocutors wish that human alternatives would develop from accommodating the needs in their home countries.

If this struggle is inhibited by succumbing to the regimes' homogenising logics and mechanisms of power, however, the informants' opposition will fade away. They would then no longer be alternatives, but instead in a state of permanent opposition with little or no voice.

Only time will tell whether or not the exiled intellectuals are able to create a perceived better world in the current global prevalence of hierarchical and exclusionary nation-states. In any case, their social critique is significant, and if they are given sufficient time and space, their oppositional views and actions may contribute to the struggle of changing the regimes in their home countries.

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Povzetek

Po vsem svetu vlade v matičnih državah preganjajo intelektualce. V prispevku se na podlagi podatkov etnografskega terenskega dela osredotočam na izgnane znanstvenike, umetnike in pisatelje, ki živijo v nordijskih državah. Življenje v izgnanstvu sogovornikom omogoča, da kritizirajo zaznano nepravičnost režimov in jim očitajo omejevanje svobode izražanja in človekovih pravic. V zameno izgnani intelektualci v svojih državah veljajo za grožnjo in jih osebno preganjajo v obliki mučenja, "ideološke prevzgoje", zapora, usmrtitve ali "izginotja". V njihovo nasprotovanje je vpeto prepričanje, da se lahko kulturne oblike spreminjajo, dvoumnost narave prevaranta pa simbolizira kljubovanje sogovornikov glede zaznane homogenosti. Analitična uporaba prevaranta daje priložnost za osvetlitev normativne zdrave pameti, ki lahko razkrije potenciale za kulturno preobrazbo statičnih kultur in identitet. Nasprotovanje sogovornikov se oblikuje z uporabo raznolikosti ustvarjalnosti in inovativnih konstelacij, kar kaže na to, da se lahko strukture moči izpodbijajo in da se družbene razmere oblikujejo prek dejanj.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: intelektualci, drugače misleči, prevarant, migracije, civilna družba

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